

Senior Drug Smugglers

By Dina Bair

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The Food and Drug Administration is outraged. Some politicians support the practice since for the first time it gives seniors the chance to get their pills at a price they can afford. But do they have to become drug smugglers to do it?

"I'd rather take the pain than paying the pharmaceutical companies," Rolf Spies says.

Two men between them purchase 22 medications a month.

"My wife is taking 14 of them," says Jack Kilroy. "The older you get, the more medication you have to take."

The fee: \$877 a month.

"This is 2.5ml and it costs \$61," Jack says.

That's with insurance.

"I'm not taking two medications already that the doctor prescribed because they are so expensive," Christel Spies says. "Being on a fixed income it means a lot."

"You're doing without food, you're doing without heat, you're doing without a lot of times the necessities to stay alive," Christel says.

The sacrifice, if it doesn't keep them alive, these men don't pay for the drugs. They do pay with pain when they forego medicine for arthritis, high blood pressure and acid reflux. That is until they found a place where they could buy their drugs for in some cases less than half of what they pay at the pharmacy.

"What I'm saving, say \$750-800 a month, I mean every three months is a pretty good piece of change at the end of the year," says one senior.

With a prescription: anti-cancer, anti-depressant and allergy drugs are all available from a discreet office simply labelled discount pharmacy service. The office is in this country. The drugs come from Canada.

Consumers find a 66 percent savings on Celebrex, a 43 percent decreased rate for Lipitor, 57 percent for Pravachol, 64 percent for Premarin, 50 percent for Prevacid and Prozac and a 67 percent savings on Tamoxifen.

Within the last few weeks, one company contacted the village of Lincolnwood looking to rent space here. So anyone could simply walk up and order medication from Canada but the village says when the FDA got wind of a possible storefront location selling medication it doesn't regulate, officials stepped in closing the doors for good before they ever opened.

"A drug brought from overseas the way some of these drugs are being purchased could be subpotent or superpotent or they could be expired. They could even be counterfeit," says William Hubbard, FDA.

But officials say keeping track of the companies selling them is difficult. Not to mention the hundreds of online sites popping up each day.

"In terms of our enforcement activities, we are trying to get the message out there to these storefronts and websites that they are violating the law and they should cease and desist," Hubbard says.

"If the FDA would restrict that type of behavior, they would probably stop the importation from the customs perspective but at this point, the consumer receives medication directly from the pharmacy to their mailbox," says Boris Vayler, of http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?ln_url=http://www.medsforall.com

That, according to the FDA is where the consumer crosses the line of the law. But seniors in need of medication are not the target of FDA investigation.

"It certainly is a violation of our act to bring an imported drug into the country. However, FDA's focus is on the people that facilitate the purchase," Hubbard says.

People who could be breaking not only federal, but state, laws as well, since in each state, the board of pharmacy says facilitators who take prescription drug orders must have an appropriate license. But Boris Vaylor says he's not dispensing medication and doesn't need a license to help seniors get the drugs they need.

"Since we are not a pharmacy we're not violating the laws, the pharmaceutical laws, we're not smuggling medications by no means. It goes through official U.S. channels.

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky says if it's the only way seniors and others can get the drugs they need without being out on the street. Then let them by Canadian.

"If the only solution is to go to Canada then let's set up mechanisms where we do protect the safety of those drugs and make sure that they're not bogus," Schakowsky says.

Because if seniors are forced to buy Americans...

"We probably would not take any medication anymore just take our chance," Christel says.

The medications are less expensive in Canada because the government regulates the cost there. Here a free market allows drug companies to raise prices as they see fit.